

Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 PER-01 PRS-01 PM-03 MC-02 L-03

INR-07 /043 R

DRAFTED BY NEA/RA:SEPALMERJR./NEA/P:MVAN ORDER:MAR

APPROVED BY P:JJSISCO

M:LSEAGLEBURGER (DRAFT)

NEA:ALATHERTONJR. (DRAFT)

M/DG:AMB. LAISE (DRAFT)

S/PRS:AMB. ANDERSON (DRAFT)

PM:TSTERN (DRAFT)

NEA:HHSAUNDERS (DRAFT)

PM/MC:WROBINSON (DRAFT)

NEA/RA:TGRANT (SUBS)

NEA/RA:EAPADELFORD (DRAFT)

NEA/ARN:ARDBAY (INFO)

S/S-MR. ORTIZ

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R 281952Z JUL 75

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

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STADIS////////////////////////////////

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, MASS, LE, US

SUBJECT:DEPARTMENT'S TREATMENT OF HANDGUN SALES

REF: BEIRUT 9348

FROM SISCO, EAGLEBURGER, LAISE, AND ATHERTON

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1. WE KEENLY RESPECT MOST OF THE VIEWS EVINced IN REFTel,

AND WELCOME YOUR FORTHRIGHTNESS IN EXPRESSING THEM.

2. PATENTLY, THESE HANDGUN SALES WERE DISTORTED BY THE PRESS HERE, AND APPARENTLY MORE SO IN BEIRUT ON THE BASIS OF REUTER'S WIRE SERVICE REPORT. JULY 22 NOON BRIEFING WENT POORLY PRIMARILY BECAUSE SITUATION WAS SUCH THAT VIRTUALLY NO DETAILS REGARDING THE TRANSACTIONS COULD BE MARSHALLED AND TRANSMITTED BETWEEN TIME STORY BROKE AND BRIEFING HELD, BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF THE HEIGHTENED, GENERALLY ANTAGONISTIC INTEREST IN ARMS SALES WITH WHICH WE HAVE BEEN CONTENDING. LATER SAME AFTERNOON DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN, AFTER CONSULTATION WITH SECRETARY, UNDER SECRETARY SISCO, AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON PROVIDED WRITTEN ANSWERS TO ALL QUESTIONS TAKEN AT NOON BRIEFING, AND MET INFORMALLY WITH A SMALL NUMBER OF INTERESTED REPORTERS FOR 5 OR 10 MINUTES TO CLARIFY ANY QUESTIONS WHICH MIGHT ARISE ON THE WRITTEN

ANSWERS HE HANDED OUT. IN FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS, SPOKESMAN WAS ASKED POSITIONS HELD BY DEPARTMENT OFFICERS INVOLVED. SPOKESMAN DID NOT VOLUNTEER NAMES, BUT ONLY IN REPLY TO QUESTIONS HE CONFIRMED NAMES OF OFFICER IN NEA/RA AND PROVIDED NAME OF THE THEN ACTING DIRECTOR OF NEA/RA AND DIRECTOR OF MUNITIONS CONTROL OFFICE. REPORTERS ALREADY KNEW NAME OF ONE WORKING LEVEL OFFICER INVOLVED BECAUSE JAMES MCCARTNEY, WHO ORIGINATED STORY, AND CBS CORRESPONDENT QUESTIONER AT AFTERNOON BRIEFING SESSION HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH HIM ON PHONE PRIOR TO SPOKESMAN MEETING WITH PRESS. STORIES APPEARING JULY 23 IN THE BALTIMORE SUN, WASHINGTON POST, AND WASHINGTON STAR DID NOT NAME DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS. UNFORTUNATELY, NAMES WERE MENTIONED IN REUTER'S WIRE SERVICE REPORT WHICH WE BELIEVE MOST LIKELY PROVIDED BASIS FOR UNFAVORABLE STORIES APPEARING IN THE BEIRUT PRESS WHICH YOU CORRECTLY CALLED TO OUR ATTENTION.

3. ON THE SUBSTANCE OF THE ISSUE, IT CAN BE ARGUED IN RETROSPECT THAT THE HANDGUN APPLICATIONS SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN APPROVED. IN ANY EVENT, THE RECORD MAKES CLEAR THAT WORKING LEVEL OFFICERS DEALING WITH THESE APPLICATIONS RECOGNIZED THEIR SENSITIVITY, DID NOT TREAT THEM ROUTINELY, DELAYED ACTION IN ORDER TO OBTAIN VIEWS OF EMBASSY BEIRUT, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND ONLY GAVE APPROVAL AFTER RECEIVING EMBASSY'S FAVORABLE RECOMMENDATION.

4. APART FROM THE JUDGMENTAL QUESTION, THIS INCIDENT SERVED TO REMIND US HOW POLITICALLY SENSITIVE ALMOST ANY SALE OF WEAPONS TO THE MIDDLE EAST CAN BE. ACCORDINGLY, THE DEPARTMENT HAS TAKEN STEPS TO ENSURE THAT DECISIONS ON LETHAL MATERIEL ARE TAKEN WITH FULL REGARD TO PUBLIC

POLICY CONTEXTS.

5. GRANT (WHOSE SOLE INVOLVEMENT WAS AUTHORIZING THE DEPARTMENT'S TIMELY QUERY TO YOU -- STATE 081964), PADELFORD AND THE SEVERAL OTHER PERTINENT PUBLICLY UNNAMED OFFICERS APPRECIATE YOUR CONCERN. NEA/RA DIRECTOR STEPHEN E. PALMER, JR, FOR WHOM PADELFORD AND GRANT WORK, WANTS TO BE ON RECORD AS BEING AMONG THE MANY DEPARTMENT OFFICERS WHO SUBSCRIBE TO YOUR SENTIMENTS REGARDING THE QUESTION OF SUPPORT OF JUNIORS BY SENIORS IN THIS INSTANCE. REPRIMANDS WERE NEVER CONTEMPLATED. WE REGARD GRANT AND PADELFORD HIGHLY, AND BOTH ARE SUFFICIENTLY BALANCED AND EXPERIENCED TO TAKE THIS DISMAL FLAP IN STRONG STRIDE.

6. AS A FINAL NOTE, WE DO TAKE STRONG ISSUE WITH YOUR CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SECRETARIAL TASK FORCE AS A "GIMMICK". TO THE CONTRARY, THAT EFFORT SERIOUSLY ADDRESSED A KEY OPERATIONAL/MORALE FACTOR. INGERSOLL

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